

SELVES INTO PERSONS: ANOTHER LEGACY FROM JOHN DEWEY

by Darnell Rucker

John Dewey opened his 1913 article on "Self" in *A Cyclopedia of Education* by saying of self that, as Augustine said of time, "Everybody knows what it is, but no one can tell."¹ And then he proceeded to tell. Yet Dewey knew that what he told was part of the story only, though he did not get around to filling it in until almost thirty years later; and, even then, so far as I know, he never completed it.

Dewey's insistence upon the thorough-going correlative nature of individual and society as a specification of his generic concept of organism-environment interaction does not need restatement to anyone familiar with his social philosophy. That concept has been persistently misinterpreted, of course, by a wide variety of critics, friendly and hostile, the misinterpretations usually resting on one or another version of the notion that human individuals have pre- or extra-social existence.

The statement of the interaction appears over and over in Dewey's works, nowhere more succinctly than in *The Public and its Problems*, where he stated the ideal of democracy, which he said is the ideal of community. He said of that ideal:

From the standpoint of the individual, it consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are common.²

What this ideal does is point a direction for needed change in educational and political processes. What it means for the individual is a

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world in which individuals function with individualized skills, interests, and purposes that are integral with socially recognized goods and share in those social values to which they contribute. What it means for the community is a coherent, flexible system of institutions so organized that it creates productive individuals, provides efficient channels for their productive activities, and makes available to individuals the values produced, all of this aimed at the primary value of human growth.

But while Dewey is concerned to eliminate the problem, inherited from an inadequate psychology, of how predetermined individuals can relate to each other and to society, his critics sometimes read into his account a mystical wholeness in which no individual can be located. He can answer this sort of criticism without much difficulty, as he did in a 1927 reply to Santayana's accusation that Dewey has a "tendency to dissolve the individual into his social functions." The reply went,

But since I find in human life, from its biological roots to its ideal flowers and fruits, things both individual and associational—each word being adjectival—I hold that nature has both an irreducible brute unique "itselfness" in everything which exists and also a connection of each thing (which is just what it is) with other things such that without them it "can neither be nor be conceived." And as far as I can follow the findings of physics, that conclusion is confirmed by the results of the examination of physical existence itself. Since experience is both individualized and associational and since experience is continuous with nature as background, as a naturalist I find nature is also both. . . . If, perchance, I have exaggerated by my manner of speech the associated aspects of experience, it is because the traditional theory of experience dominated by a false psychology (as the traditional view of nature which Santayana reflects is dominated by a false physics) has ignored and denied that phase, assuming, as Mr. Santayana appears to do, a sole and lonely here and now.³

Although Arthur F. Bentley might object to this statement as expressing what he calls the interactional view in contrast to what he wants to call the transactional,⁴ Dewey's position on entities as separate existences is not confused, I think, by this recognition of common-sense individuals.

But to revert to the opening remark to the effect that Dewey never satisfactorily worked out the concept of the human individual, it seems to me that he was recognizing this unfinished business when, in the 1939 Schilpp volume on Dewey, he admitted to Gordon Allport's charge that he had not worked out a theory of personality. There is a certain poignancy in that admission, because Dewey was there owning to a long-standing problem with an awareness that gained little from Allport's criticism. Dewey said,

Returning now to specific criticisms of Dr. Allport, I am obliged to admit what he says about the absence of an adequate theory of personality. In a desire to cut loose from the influence of older "spiritualistic" theories about the nature of the unity and stability of

the personal self (regarded as a peculiar kind of substantial-stuff), I failed to show how natural conditions provide support for integrated and potentially equilibrated personality-patterns. . . . Dr. Allport criticizes my writings in the field where the psychology of persons in their social (inter-personal) relations is peculiarly weighty, on the ground that I have failed to show the compatibility of a community of integrated persons with the variety of segmental types of publics which are due to specialization of interests and divisions of labor. I certainly admit that at the present time the problem is unsolved, and would go so far as to say that as a practical problem it is *the* problem of our day and generation.⁷

Dewey again referred to this failing a few years later in his correspondence with Bentley, when he said, "I still have to get systematically the matter of 'persons' as a *social* term instead of [their being] set over against 'social.'"⁶ And earlier in that correspondence, he had referred to what he called "some notes entitled 'Persons and Things' [to the effect that] normal human beings have certain distinctive properties, and the distinction between person and thing is a highly important social-behavioral distinction."⁷ In a letter dated ten days later, he expanded on that reference by adding, "I have written chapters on 'Persons and Things' and on 'mind and matter,' but [I] started all over again last fall, and haven't got back to those topics yet."⁸

I have made use of an item headed "Chapter IX Things and Persons," an unpublished, very rough typescript in the Morris Library of Southern Illinois University.⁹ I assume that these are the notes (or chapter) to which Dewey referred, but I have not found any record of the new start he mentions. At any rate, this typescript contains the basis for a concept of person that seems a major step in the direction of that systematic account Dewey wanted to develop and thus an important step toward an analysis of the problem of the individual that so haunts this century.

At the time he wrote the article on "Self" mentioned in the opening of this paper, he also wrote an article on "Personality," in which he stated an approximation to the idea he was working on in "Things and Persons." In 1913, he said:

Personality is closely allied with the conceptions of individuality and selfhood. Taken literally, it means the state or quality of being a person. The concept of person arose in connection with Roman law. To be a person was to be a subject of legal rights and responsibilities; that is, of powers and duties capable of enforcement by civil authority. On this view, a corporation or minor civic group, likely a municipality, was a person; slaves were not persons, while minors were persons only vicariously, or through their authorized representatives. As the external traits of this legal view disappeared, an ethical sense developed out of them; a person is the subject of moral rights and duties.¹⁰

And a little farther on, he added, "Individuality expresses what one uniquely *is*; personality expresses what one *has*—a property that one may

acquire." This is as much as he said at that point by way of definition of person, and he concluded the article with the remark, "With the development of the democratic idea, rights of personality were extended to children, and methods of education have accordingly undergone considerable reconstruction. No consistent theory upon this point has, however, as yet, been worked out in practice."

On the other hand, he was more specific about a self. In the article on that topic, he characteristically spelled out the meaning of self in terms of biological, psychological, and social capacities: first, the capacity to feel, especially to feel pleasure and pain; second, the capacity to recollect feelings, to connect them with objects, to make those objects ends of anticipation, desire, and aversion, and to integrate experiences on the basis of their felt qualities; and third, the capacity to distinguish the self from other selves as a result of becoming an integral yet distinct member of an association.¹¹ The biological base and the psychological manifestation obviously develop into a self only in association with already functioning selves. These capacities are discussed and expanded upon in a range of Dewey's works, though later he is more likely to refer to behaviors than to capacities.

In "Things and Persons," Dewey shows how any living creature is discriminated as individual by means of observation of its behavior. In line with his reply to Santayana, Dewey points out that, in vital behavior of an animal, generic traits are found in integral association with individual traits. "Sheep are sheep and dogs are dogs," he says, "But shepherds know the several members of their flocks in their severality; they can tell them 'apart,' i.e. individually."¹² "Individual," he says, is an adjectival term derived from adverbial force and function. Different qualities in ways of behaving in connection with one another are the basis on which the shepherd distinguishes his sheep; that is, their individualities emerge only in their association. They are distinguished as sheep (in contrast to goats) on the basis of a general hereditary continuity of behavior; they are distinguished as individual sheep on the basis of particular historical continuities of behavior. Again, "individual" is an adjective describing a particular serial history of behavior of any living creature; and what is described is an observable uniqueness of behavior within an association. A human infant is individualized in the observation and description of its parent in the same way in which the shepherd individualizes his sheep.

The distinction of a self requires something more by way of difference in behavior, of course. In the paper I am using, however, Dewey moves from discrimination of any organism to that of a person. But to be consistent with what I take him to intend by "person," the argument should go from any individual to self and only then to person. The observable behavior that would serve to distinguish a self from an organism that is not

a self would be just those behaviors that mark what is seen usually as the normal growth of a human infant. An infant is most markedly an individual to its parents, but the infant only at a later stage of development evinces behaviors that enable an impartial observer to detect a self, behaviors that demonstrate in interaction with other selves an awareness of the self as distinct from those others. The important difference between a thing and a self is that, unlike a plant or most lower animals, the individualization of a self, as both Mead and Dewey point out, is not merely individualization in the observation and description of another but also individualization of the self by the self.

Dewey discusses an aspect of this self-distinction in *Human Nature and Conduct*, where he describes individual mind as constituted of those elements of a problematic situation that cluster about a desire for reconstruction of that situation but that are rejected by the situation at the moment.¹³ Those elements and that desire then are felt to belong to the self in partial and perhaps temporary, perhaps long-term opposition to the environment. Thus one's uniqueness as individual mind does set the individual self off from the environment, from society. The self must distinguish itself *also* by observation of its own behavior in some association. And cultural conditions determine whether subjective or objective distinctions dominate the self's awareness of itself.

The key to the distinction between self and person that I want to draw appears to be the legal origin of person that Dewey referred to in the 1913 article. That reference reappears in the letter to Bentley first mentioned, although Dewey did *not* make legal status a difference between self and person. What he said there is:

As I've suggested before, if I knew more law, I could do a better job. You wouldn't object, I take [it], to the fact that certain business men are insurance *agents* and others are *agents* with respect to other humans who are "principals." Of course, the word "agents" and action in connection with them is subject to misuse and, even if rightly used, to misunderstanding by readers. What I want to do is in effect to interpret the words "self," "person," etc., in terms analogous to the social-behavioral use of "agent" in such cases as I've mentioned.¹⁴

What turns out to be crucial in this connection of person with agent is the representative character of relationships designated as personal. In "Things and Persons," Dewey's genetic method pushes him back to the original Latin meaning of *persona* to show how "person" developed from the theatrical term for mask, in order to emphasize this representative character. The actor represents a character in a play, as Dewey says, "not merely *before* an audience but *to* them in a social exchange, receiving some sort of reward in return for services rendered."¹⁵ Here, I would say, it is important to note, in addition to the representative role of the actor, the

reciprocal relation of actor to audience, a reciprocity that must, by virtue of the representative role of the actor, be an exchange of goods different in kind. The audience is not in a position to play a representative role *to* the actor in return for the actor's role.

As the next step, the use of "person" in Roman law (mentioned in the 1913 article) then carried the representative and reciprocal meanings of the term outside the theater into the civic arena. I interpret Dewey's intention here as implying that the moral meaning that emerged from the legal meaning of "person" carried those same characters with it; but it seems necessary to note that, with the inordinate emphasis on the subjective self brought about by recent religious and industrial developments, the representative and reciprocal nature of personality has become more and more obscure; and "person" has tended to merge with "self"—the great and crescive self of Emerson—the self that presents itself as existing in terrible isolation.

Dewey shows, in typical fashion, in this typescript, how the current notions of self derive from the Greek and Christian idea of a metaphysical spiritual entity, transformed successively and cumulatively in Western thought into the self as knower (thus in opposition to the object as known), the self as separate moral agent (thus in opposition to society), and the self as private and exclusive consciousness (thus in opposition to the entire rest of the universe). In contrast to this line of development, he argues, again typically, that the idea of personal selves is to be verified in actual observations, not in any metaphysical, epistemological, political, or psychological theory used to explain experience.¹⁶

The starting point of such verification is, as usual, the behavior of organisms in interaction with an environment. And this is the point in "Things and Persons" at which he takes up the process of discriminating any individual creature, which I spoke of before, and then moves to the process of discriminating persons. He points out that individuality can be characterized by the adjective "personal" only as the behavior of the organism is modified by cultural-social conditions. He gives as evidence of the strictly cultural status of personality the ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court that a corporation is a person. We cannot make sense of such a ruling under the old mentalistic-spiritualistic conception of personality, since corporations do not have souls. Thus, Dewey claims, we are forced to go back to the etymology of *persona*, as previously mentioned, in order to detect how the Court could arrive at its use of "person."¹⁷

The argument he offers is that organic behavior is transformed into personal behavior in the same manner as sounds are transformed into meanings in virtue of *their* representative function. "For when sounds

become words," he writes, "the original qualities of the sounds (or marks on paper) are completely subordinated to the meanings they bear, the meanings being themselves derived in the process of communication from the way they operate and the results they effect in maintaining and promoting conjoint or shared activities, whether cooperative or competitive."¹⁸ Organic behavior similarly *becomes* personal in the process of certain kinds of cultural interactions—specifically, cultural interactions that involve representative roles. Dewey says,

The cases previously cited of specific representative function in human association, such as authorized agents, priests, trustees, elected representatives in law-making bodies, guardians, are cases directly in point. To possess and exercise an *office* is to be representative and the history of the development of offices, or representative functions, is the history of transformation of biological traits into traits constituting persons."¹⁹

This statement makes clear what Dewey meant in the 1913 article when he said that personality is something acquired—as an office is acquired.

It is in connection with tracing the history of that transformation that the significance of law for the concept of person becomes evident. A biological function such as care for offspring becomes a personal function only as "something of the nature of *responsibility* for performance of the functions comes into existence on the part of progenitors and something of the nature of a *right* to protection and nurture on the part of offspring. Then the execution of a biological function becomes an office, and an office takes on rudimentary moral quality."²⁰ This personal quality of a function *seems* to evolve, for Dewey, from the biological function in three stages: first, that of customary expectations in primitive social groups, loosely enforced by signs of approval or disapproval; second, that of habitual demands (that I would call traditional as distinct from customary) that are more overtly enforced by social pressures; and third, that of legal regulations, authoritatively enforced.²¹ In the process of this development, duty becomes, as Dewey says, an inward disposition as well as a social expectation.

I take it that, as usually is the case in such an evolution, Dewey intends us to understand that customs and traditions remain as ground for overt legal regulation. If so, then the breakdown of custom and tradition in the face of the advances of science and technology and the resultant far-reaching social changes relate directly to the relative ineffectiveness of law. But another factor, from the individual side, in light of this analysis of the evolution of personality, is that, while the legal nature of personality still is a fact, the individuals who think of themselves as subjective selves rather than as what Dewey calls personal selves do not appreciate that fact.

As I keep mentioning, Dewey nowhere, so far as I know, distinguishes self and person directly. In fact he uses "self" and "person" interchangeably through most of this paper. But following his argument that persons and things develop out of a common emotional material—an argument directed primarily against his old enemies, the notions that sensations are passively received and that sensations are originally singular and simple—he makes a distinction between "person" and "man" that seems to me to be based on a difference that holds between a self and a person and that is implied in his use of the term "personal self." He says,

"person" stands for something more than "man" does; it stands for *man* plus a special representative power that has evolved in social groups in which jural relations have received a fairly high degree of enunciation. Perhaps the fact that in most modern societies "voter" has meant more than "citizen," just as citizen has a fuller meaning than alien, may suggest the kind of difference. Similarly a person must be a human being, a man or woman, but must also possess additional capacities that exist (operate) only in a group in which there exist such relational functions as formulated liabilities, rights, duties, and immunities.²²

Using a different terminology, he had made much this same distinction a few years before in *Experience and Education*, when he said, "the authority in question [of a parent] when exercised in a well-regulated household or other community group is not a manifestation of merely personal will; the parent or teacher exercises it as the representative and agent of the interests of the group as a whole."²³ The use of "personal" as opposed to "representative" marks this passage as prior to "Things and Persons" and will be referred to later.

Dewey's definition of a person in his typescript amounts to this: a person is a human being or self functioning in a human association in a representative capacity in such a way as to acquire recognized rights and duties growing out of that representative activity. If we take this notion of "person" and look back at Dewey's characterization of a self, I think it is possible to see that a child, for instance, can have the capacities Dewey set down for a self, can be integrated into an association involving rights and duties, without yet being *representative* of the association or of any of its other members. And while the child will have legally-recognized rights growing out of the offices of parents or guardians, the *child* has no office, is not yet a person. It is only in light of some such distinction as this that "self" and "person" do not merge in meaning. It seems obvious that a child or a retarded adult or even possibly an exotically-trained chimpanzee can fulfill Dewey's three criteria for a self without being a person, simply because the self concerned has no representative role.

The distinction Dewey made in the passage cited from *Experience and Education* between personal and representative functions of a parent

would, with the later terminology, become a distinction between individual and personal functions. The control a parent rightfully exercises over a child is a personal control, as representative of those interests of the child, the family, and the community that the child cannot yet represent. The parent who controls a child merely from the individual perspective of the parent may be trying to shape the child's behavior so that it reflects credit on the parent or so that it does not inconvenience the parent, but the parent is not behaving as a person in that relation. In the same way, a teacher who simply keeps order in a class and imposes an official lesson plan on the students in all probability is behaving as an individual who happens to be hired as a teacher. A teacher as person will teach as a representative of the values of the community and the interests of the students and the school, not as an individual trying to maximize his or her status, income, or comfort.

One's uniqueness as individual mind does set his self off from the environment, as I said above. But personality, in Dewey's sense, does not set one over against the community; rather it involves one necessarily *with* some community. No one can be a person except as he enters into a social process as a representative of other persons or a group. In other words, the individual considered as a separate entity could have no personal being and could not act in the moral sense of that word, but only could *respond* to the social process without being integral with it or it with him. Dewey's often repeated statement that genuine duties are not externally imposed but are conditions of the activities in which we are involved then means that those activities, and hence those duties, are *ours* only as we enter them in a representative capacity, hence as essentially constituted in our behavior by relations to others.

Persons are not thereby dissolved into their social functions, as Santayana says of Dewey's individuals. (Obviously, individuals, in Dewey's use of that term, by definition are not dissolved into anything else.) Persons are distinguished from the social processes in which they operate because they play varying and distinguishing roles. There were no persons in monolithic tribal cultures just because there were no such distinguishable roles. Dewey is concerned to assert of persons, in "Things and Persons," that they are *objects* just as trees and fishes are objects and that persons are distinguished as objects in the world that manifest distinctive kinds of behavior *in* the world, just as trees and fishes are. In his discussion of corporate personality in *Philosophy and Civilization* in 1931, he used the language of his later definition of person to make his point:

the right-and-duty-bearing unit, or subject, signifies whatever has consequences of a specified kind. The reason that molecules or trees are not juridical "subjects" is then clear; they do not display the specified consequences. The definition of a legal subject is

thus a legitimate, and quite conceivably a practically important matter. But it is a matter of analysis of facts, not of search for an inhering essence. The facts in question are whatever specific consequences flow from being right-and-duty-bearing units. . . . The consequences must be social in character, and they must be *such* social consequences as are controlled and modified by being the bearing of rights and obligations, privileges and immunities. Molecules and trees certainly have social consequences; but these consequences are what they are irrespective of their having rights and duties.²⁴

Those rights and duties define a person, whether an organism or a corporation, and consequences that turn on rights and duties mark the behavior in the world that distinguishes persons from things—and from mere selves without offices.

Selves have functions, of course. It is only in the most extreme pathological case that a self exists simply as private. But selves without office function as functionaries, as worker ants function in an ant colony or as assembly-line workers function in an industrial plant. This distinction would seem to be what Emerson intended by his distinction between being a worker and being *man* working. A worker is a functionary, the finger or thumb the economic system turns a man into. *Man* working has an office and thus can function, not as a thumb, but as a *person*.²⁵

Previous theory, Dewey points out, inverted the actual order of relations, holding that moral relations exist because humans are intrinsically persons; whereas what actually occurs is that humans *become* persons with the rise of offices having moral qualities. Just as certain acts become virtues because of the favorable responses they habitually evoke in others, so humans become persons because of "pressures, influences, and commendations occurring in group and communal life." He sums up this point by saying,

It is in and because of interplay among expectations, demands, fulfillments and evasions, with accompanying praise and blame, reward and penalty, approval and disapproval, that modes of behavior take on acknowledged social importance and become representative of social values; that is, of activities which are taken by the group to be important for group welfare and perpetuation. Human beings, as the bearers of these representative functions, or offices, come into possession of the properties that describe a *personal* being.²⁶

This notion of person, as essentially tied to *office*, seems to me to go a step beyond Mead's idea of "taking the role of the other."²⁷ Being a representative of others is something more than thinking oneself in the others' places for the purpose of directing one's own actions in relation to them or to some common end. The player on a team, in Dewey's sense, *represents* the whole team from his particular (individualized) position insofar as he is a team player (or person) rather than a "star" (or individual self) using the team for his individual aggrandizement. A player on a high

school team, for example, may represent, in his play, the team, which, in turn, may represent the school and the village or town and even, under certain conditions of competition, the state or the nation. In such a process, the team members can be observed to emerge more and more strongly as personages within their expanding social contexts and for the duration of their team membership.

Mead's account of the genesis of a self is a sophisticated analysis of the emergence of the third capacity Dewey named as characterizing a self.²⁸ And although Mead's terminology sometimes comes close to Dewey's formulation of what constitutes a person, I do not see that Mead actually makes the connection to office that Dewey does here. In fact, Mead uses "personal" in *Mind, Self and Society* as synonymous with "individual" in most places, and on occasion uses it to mean that which is explicitly asocial.²⁹ Even Mead's idea of the generalized other is developed in terms of taking the *attitude* of the whole community. The player on a team takes the attitude of the whole team and thus is able to act intelligently and efficiently in relation to the rest of the team. This kind of attitude constitutes the intelligence required for a self. But Dewey's concept of a person involves more than taking the attitude of another or even of the entire community. It involves representing that other or community, literally *acting for* the other. To say that one must take the attitude of the other in order to represent that other is to say that one must be a self in order to become a person. To act *for* another requires having a sense of the stance of that other but also having a sense of the interests of that other in a broader perspective than the individual or group stance. Needless to say, while all players are selves, few are *persons* as team members—a fact overtly attested to by any number of professional athletes of our day.

The practical problem Dewey called *the* problem of our day and generation in his reply to Allport is at least clarified by some of the implications of this idea of person. That problem was the one of how highly individualized and specialized selves can compose a community. If we admit that behaving organisms are gradually (*not* all at once) transformed into selves, then there must be degrees of selfhood, as we can observe in the maturation of a child. Likewise, if selves are gradually (*not* all at once) transformed into persons, there must be degrees of personality, a fact we *need* to observe in the maturation process. If, in addition, we admit that selves do not act in the sense in which only agents can act, then, it is seen that the actualization of community depends upon the emergence of increasingly representative activities on the part of individuals. Individuality, for observers, as Dewey has shown, is distinguished by publicly observable behavior in the case of organisms, selves, and persons alike. Individuality recognized by the observed form does not exist for mere things. For a self, its individuality is observed both by the same sort of observation of

behavior in the environment as other observers use *and* by observations of those subjective elements and desires that have no place in the environment and so individualize the self as in opposition to the environment. A person, in turn, distinguishes his *personal* individuality by observation of his official (hence necessarily public and communal) functions and is distinguished by others in the same fashion.

To go back to the assumptions just made, I think, first, that the evidence for the gradual (not abrupt) transformation of organisms into selves and of selves into persons is the body of evidence in the sciences for interconnection and continuity in general—evidence such as that for fields in physics, child development in psychology, and evolution in biology. Second, and as a bare sketch, only agents act because action is a particular kind of social process involving communication, which in turn depends upon shared values. As Plato says about writing, in the *Phaedrus*, and demonstrates about conversation, in all the dialogues, there is no communication without a common purpose. Acting is the process of making real *in the world something that was real only in idea or ideal*. And while we still may think of ideas as private, when we recognize their linguistic and social nature, we see that ideas are shared values if they are realizable. Private ideas are precisely those elements *rejected* by the world. Ideals that are not private pipe dreams are ideas that, while never realized *fully*, are capable of approximate realization *as* shared values. Thus, to act to realize an idea is to represent some group constituted by communication. A self conceived of as private does not act; it only responds, as Mead's dogs in a dog fight respond to signals, no matter how much more sophisticated may be that self's responses. Again, Plato shows this point with his distinction between an art and a knack, in the *Gorgias*. Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles are successful in Athenian society by a knack, a cleverness in responding to signals. Callicles, as a politician, cannot represent the Athenian *demos*, because he shares no values with it; he can only respond to its signals to try to stay in its favor. His behavior can only produce disorder in himself and in the *demos*, with results no one can predict, because disorder is random.

It also occurs to me that Elijah Jordan, in his book *The Good Life*, was getting at this notion of person when he said that the individual does not act, only institutions act.³⁰ We can interpret that rather startling statement, I think, to mean that the mere individual self does not act, only persons act, through offices; and offices are instituted in the culture.

Let me use a social phenomenon of our day to illustrate further the use of the idea of person as representative. Dewey remarks that we discriminate males from females on the basis of qualities of their behavior. He adds that figure or physique serves for purposes of discrimination *because* bodily structures are connected with specifiable modes of inter-activity. Thus we can say that female *persons* are distinguished by their sexually different

representative roles from male persons. Where there is no sexual difference in representative roles, persons do not differ as male and female but as individuals. The office of a mother is distinct from that of a father, but a female should be able to acquire any office of which she is capable, so long as it is compatible with any sexually-related office she assumes. And the same should be said of a male. Once more, Plato foreshadows this view. In his major psychological dialogue, the *Republic*, he argues that the only sexually-related roles in his city built of words are those of bearing and nursing children, on one hand, and of siring them, on the other. All other roles are to be acquired by ability without regard to sex. This most radical of views for an Athenian reflects Plato's sense that women could not become persons except as they could hold offices. That sense is borne out by the debates in pagan and Christian literature (which Dewey mentions) as to whether women had souls and so whether they were persons.³¹ The offices that constitute persons must be *recognized* as such in the social context; and, so long as the roles permitted to women were considered trivial or non-existent, women were not persons, except in extraordinary circumstances, such as those of queens and priestesses.

Closer to our own time, women have begun to fight to become persons, and that fight has become more and more open and organized. The maiden aunt in New England had to strive desperately on her own for some small role in relations with her parents and nephews and nieces. Emily Dickinson, with no office, retired into her house and *created* an office by becoming a representative of humankind in her poetry. Virginia Woolf expressed a fleeting sense of this office in *A Writer's Diary* when she said: "I thought, driving through Richmond last night, something very profound about the synthesis of my being: how only writing composes it: how nothing makes a whole unless I am writing: now I have forgotten what seemed so profound."³² Male writers, too, may have only a writing office, but generally not because society cuts them off from all other roles.

One last example: The individual I think of as the outstanding personage of our century is Eleanor Roosevelt, and I think it because she struggled, against formidable barriers erected by her family and her society, to transform herself into a person by acquiring, on her own, offices of worldwide scope—not legally authorized offices, but moral offices of an effectiveness and authority that could not be ignored. Eleanor Roosevelt is still being vilified, but *she* was not trapped by her femaleness nor was she a lost individual, because she became, for people throughout the world, the representative of the poor, the maligned, the oppressed.

The lost individual, to return from these by-ways, is an individual arrested in its development at a stage of selfhood in which its behavior is

dominated by its subjective distinctions. The only way in which that individual will be found or *located* is by evolving beyond that truncated sense of selfhood, through a recovery of the sense of the public dimension of selfhood, to the emergence of personality, which will be realized in and through the individual's behavior as communal.

Integration into a community of the individual *as* individual is made possible by the attainment of personhood on the part of the individual. That attainment may be of a relatively unconscious habit of representative behavior or of a highly conscious one. Social organizations of the past served individuals in them by inculcating such representative habits, frequently without explicit awareness of them. The family, when it was an economic rather than a dormitory unit, built into the children in it a sense of their function, which could rather easily evolve into a sense of office. The child on a family farm, early on, knew that the family required that a variety of chores be performed. Under the best circumstances, those chores were not felt as impositions by parents, even when the chores were onerous, but were felt as conditions of the family's existence. A child so socialized could mature and move out of the family into the larger community, carrying that sense of office in such a way that it grew with relative ease from narrower to wider offices.

Existing institutions, by and large, no longer succeed in socializing their members into persons. One function after another has been removed from the family into specialized corporate units—education, religion, economic production; and those units have prospered by specializing individuals, even by mechanizing them for the sake of technical efficiency. For the economic system or the education system to serve human ends rather than its own ends, that system will have to be reconstructed so as to produce persons and reward them as persons. Before such a reconstruction is so much as possible, individuals will have to come to understand the facts and the potentialities of their present problematic situation. Dewey's concept of person, more fully worked out, strikes me as a potentially valuable instrument for the assessment of our plight.

Many of our corporations actively discourage agency in their members by their ruthless attitudes toward individuals in them. An individual cannot in his behavior become truly representative of a corporation that may fire him or shunt him aside at any time. Some Japanese corporations have avoided this particular organizational weakness, but at the cost of a paternalism that has its own depersonalizing consequences.

Even before they move into corporations, we make it difficult for our children ever to become persons, because we educate them in no offices. Their function as children is to learn, but that learning is so cut

off from the society that it cannot constitute an office. We make it impossible for the elderly to remain persons, because we turn them out of any offices they may have had. Their function is to be retired, and that is as nonsensical a notion as any culture has concocted.

What Dewey saw as *the* problem remains *our* problem. He stated it many times. I will close with a statement from *Freedom and Culture* in which he said:

individuals at present find themselves in the grip of immense forces whose workings and consequences they have no power of affecting. The situation calls emphatic attention to the need for face-to-face associations whose interactions with one another may offset if not control the dread impersonality of the sweep of present forces. There is a difference between a society, in the sense of an association, and a community. Electrons, atoms, and molecules are in association with one another. Nothing exists in isolation anywhere throughout nature. Natural associations are conditions for the existence of a community, but a community adds the function of communication in which emotions and ideas are shared as well as joint undertakings engaged in.³³

Dewey's last struggle to formulate the meaning of the kind of personality that requires and is required by community marks one more legacy of this philosopher to those who share his ideal—share that recognition which he states in "Things and Persons," "that *all* normal human beings are persons potentially," a recognition that "is itself the product and mark of a great moral advance in the constitution of human society."³⁴

NOTES

1. Paul Monroe, ed., *A Cyclopedia of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), vol. V, p. 317. Reprinted in JoAnn Boydston, ed., *John Dewey. The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, vol. 7 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1979), p. 339.

2. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt, 1927), p. 147.

3. John Dewey, "Half-Hearted Naturalism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 24, No. 3 (Feb. 3, 1927):63. Reprinted in Sidney Morgenbesser, ed., *Dewey and His Critics* (New York: The Journal of Philosophy, 1977), p. 365. Quoted by permission.

4. John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949), p. 108.

5. John Dewey, "Experience, Knowledge and Value," in Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of John Dewey* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1939), pp. 555-556. Quoted by permission.

6. Sidney Ratner, Jules Altman, and James Wheeler, eds., *John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley: A Philosophical Correspondence, 1932-1951* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers, The State University, 1964), p. 112. Letter is dated June 24, 1942. All quotations herein are reprinted by permission of Rutgers University Press.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 94. Letter is dated March 9, 1942.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 97. Letter is dated March 19, 1942.

9. This item is listed in the bibliography of Ratner and Altman as "Persons and Things," unpublished. This is the title Dewey uses in his letter, but the paper itself is titled "Things and Persons." The forty-two page typescript is in the Special Collections, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. It is quoted with the permission of the Center for Dewey Studies, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. I have corrected punctuation, spelling, and other obvious typing errors freely; and where there are interlinings, I have used what I take to be the meanings intended.

10. *A Cyclopedia of Education*, vol. IV, p. 649. *Middle Works*, vol. 7, p. 295.

11. *A Cyclopedia of Education*, vol. V, pp. 317-318. *Middle Works*, vol. 7, pp. 339-341.

12. Dewey, "Things and Persons," p. 6.

13. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: Henry Holt, 1922), p. 87.

14. Ratner and Altman, *Dewey and Bentley*, p. 112.

15. Dewey, "Things and Persons," p. 12.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-6.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

23. John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 59. Quoted by permission.

24. John Dewey, *Philosophy and Civilization* (New York: Minton Balch, 1931), pp. 149-150. Quoted by permission.

25. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Selected Writings of Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 1940), p. 46.

26. Dewey, "Things and Persons," p. 15.

27. George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), pp. 144-164.

28. George Herbert Mead, "The Genesis of the Self and Social Control," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Andrew J. Reck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), pp. 267-293.

29. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, pp. 312-313 and 321.

30. E. Jordan, *The Good Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 81.

31. Dewey, "Things and Persons," p. 36.

32. Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1954), p. 201. Quoted by permission.

33. John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* (New York: Putnam, 1939), p. 159.

34. Dewey, "Things and Persons," p. 36.